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*As a lie demands a good memory, so should one note that a fact
may merely mark a point where an investigation ceases.*



Sing a Song for TONY

A Novelette by
Jack Ritchie

DID you kill Mike Lannigan?" I asked.

"Sure," Tony answered.

"Why?"

My brother idly tested the bars of his cell. "I was hired to do it."

"Who hired you?"

"Henry Allison." Tony turned. "In case you don't connect the

name, that is the Governor's son."

I waited for more, but Tony just smiled.

"All right," I said finally. "I'll play along for a little while more. Why did Allison hire you?"

"Personal reasons. He didn't tell me."

"How much did he pay you?"

"How does \$10,000 sound?"

"Fine. Is that what you want to say in court?"

"Something like that," Tony said. "I'm depending on you to plug up any loopholes."

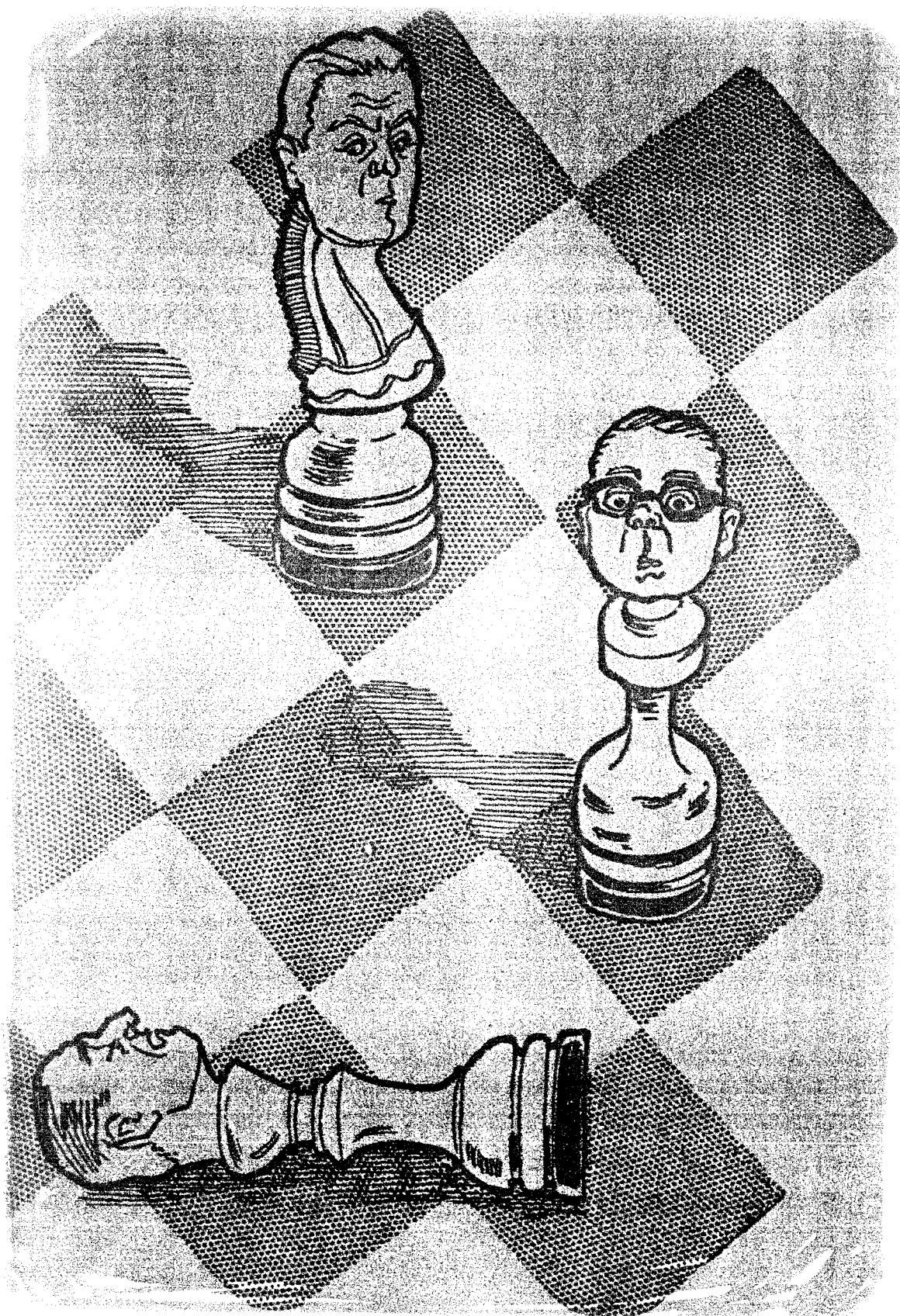
Tony studied me and then spoke again. "I always figured that if I got to walk to the little green door, I'd go cool and easy. But that was a dream and this is for real. Now I discover I sweat when I think about the chair."

I rapped a cigarette out of my pack. "So far I don't see how anybody can keep you from it."

"Including you? My brother who did so well in law school?"

"Including me."

He grinned suddenly. "Maybe you can't. But the Governor's son can."



"How do you figure that?"

Tony rubbed the back of his neck. "When the cops brought me in, I kept my mouth shut like a smart boy would, but I kept thinking. First, I figure that maybe my only out from the chair is to make like a monkey when I get to court and get put down for crazy. But then I'm not so sure. Nowdays they have psychiatrists who'll swear you're sane even when they see you walking on the ceiling."

Tony smiled. "And then suddenly I get this bright neon thought: The governor's son is going to keep me from the chair, and my little brother who lives on the west coast is going to take care of all the details and see that the whole project runs off smooth."

The phone call from Tony's lawyer had come at four this morning, and within an hour I was aboard a plane for the mid-west.

A man met me when I landed. "Philip Walker?"

"Yes."

He extended a hand. "I'm Frank Jordan, your brother's lawyer. We'll talk in the car."

The shuttle bus took us to the parking lot and Jordan unlocked the door of his sedan. "According to the police, it happened at the Hotel Medford in mid-town. A nightclub owner named Mike Lan-

nigan had a suite on the sixth floor. So at about two this morning, there's a commotion up there. Furniture getting thrown around, and the neighbors complain to the desk clerk. He sends up the hotel detective. The man gets up there and listens, and sure enough the neighbors are right. He's just about to knock, when he hears a shot."

Jordan backed the car out of the parking lot. "The detective is just about to break in when the door opens and out steps your brother."

Jordan's car headed for the airport gate. "According to the police, he's a little surprised by the reception in the hall, because by this time the hotel dick happens to have a gun in his hand. So Tony just puts up his hands and surrenders without making trouble."

Jordan waited for an opening in the traffic and then pulled onto the highway. "So Tony gets herded back into the suite. The place is a mess and right in the middle of that mess is Lannigan. He's lying there with a bullet clean through his forehead and not so clean coming out the back."

"What did Tony tell the police?"

"Nothing. He kept his mouth shut."

"And what did he tell you?"

Jordan was faintly irritated. "Not a thing. He just told me to get in touch with you and have you come

right away, and I did just that."

I watched a car pass us and then asked, "There was no one else in that suite besides Tony and Lannigan?"

"Nobody. There's only one door to the hall and the house detective filled that. The suite's on the sixth floor and nobody could have gotten in or out of one of the windows. It's sheer drop; no ledge or anything."

Jordan sighed. "And another thing, I'll have trouble getting anybody to listen to a self-defense plea. Tony had the murder weapon in his shoulder holster and it was the only gun in the place."

I gave it a little thought. "Was the house detective the only one who saw Tony coming out of the suite?"

"Unfortunately, no. The couple next door, the ones who made the complaint, had their door open and were watching to see the entertainment. They didn't miss anything."

"What were Lannigan and Tony having trouble about?"

"Tony won't say."

Jordan kept one hand on the wheel and fumbled for his pack of cigarettes with the other. "By the way, you're supposed to use another name when you go to see Tony. He doesn't want anybody to know that you're his brother."

"Why not?"

Jordan shrugged. "I suppose, because he's in trouble, he doesn't want any of the black to rub off on you."

Now, alone with Tony in his cell, I said, "All right, Tony, tell me what this is really all about."

Tony began pacing. "I'm the boy who supplies Lannigan's Club with most of his liquor. You know, the kind that isn't exactly quality, but it's got the right labels and tax stamps if you don't look too close. For maybe five years I get Lannigan his booze. But then he starts cutting his order. Naturally I get curious and check. I find that his business is just the same as usual, maybe better. So I wait until early in the morning, when I know Lannigan's going to be alone back in his hotel, and I go up to see him. 'What gives?' I ask. And he tells me that I'm being undercut by somebody from St. Louis who offers a better price. That don't sit with me, so I give Lannigan notice to quit buying out of town. But he don't see it that way, and the next thing you know we're swinging away. After a while it don't do my temper any good to find myself on the floor looking up. So I pulled the gun and used it."

"It was that simple?"

Tony nodded. "That simple.

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Maybe you could call it self-defense, but with the reputation I got, who's going to believe it?"

"And so for some reason you want to drag in the Governor's son? Why?"

Tony stopped pacing. "In this state, and maybe in all of them, for all I know, the man who hires a killer is just as guilty as if he pulled the trigger. If the killer goes to the chair, then the man who hires him goes there too."

"And you want company?"

He waved a hand impatiently. "Look, it's like this. Both Henry Allison and I get convicted of Lannigan's murder. We both get the chair. But do you think the governor is going to let his son go to the chair? No! So he commutes his son's death sentence. But can he leave it there? No. He's got to commute mine too."

"Tony," I said. "You're wild. You're reaching way out. But just for argument's sake, what kind of a motive could Henry Allison have for wanting Lannigan dead?"

Tony's eyes gleamed. "That's what started my thoughts. The motive." He brushed some hair from his eyes. "Two weeks ago I dropped in at Lannigan's for a drink. The club was pretty crowded, just before the floor show, but I noticed this one particular table. That's where the Governor's son is

sitting, a little guy with glasses. I don't know he's the Governor's son at the time, but somebody tells me later."

"A little guy with glasses? Is that what made you notice him?"

"So it wasn't him I noticed first. It was the girl. I still don't know who she was, but she looked like that was the first time she'd ever been in a place like Lannigan's and it might be the last. I don't mean that she looked down on anything, but you could tell she didn't seem to think the place was too interesting."

He rubbed his neck. "Well, Lannigan's got a hobby. Putting feathers in his bonnet, if you get me, and when he sees this here dame, he must have figured that here's a real pretty one for the collection. You could throw all the others away and your bonnet would still be the best in town.

"So he walks over to this table and sits down. I'm on the other side of the room and not a lip reader, but it don't take much to see that he's not welcome. Well, this little guy don't like the familiarity or the conversation, because the next thing you know he reaches across the table and slaps Lannigan."

"Slaps?"

"Right. It sort of started out as a punch, but by the time it got to

Lannigan's face, his hand was open and it turned into a slap. I don't read minds either, but my guess is that he wanted to punch Lannigan, but he suddenly realized how big Lannigan was and that there would be a hard punch coming back fast. So he sort of compromised with the slap and hoped he'd get away with it."

"Did he?"

"He didn't get punched. Lannigan just blinks and grabs the little guy by the collar and the seat of the pants and tippy-toes him all the way out of the club. The rear exit is right near, but Lannigan makes a production out of it. He

takes Allison through the whole place and throws him out the front onto the sidewalk."

Tony's eyes relived it for a moment. "I followed, like a lot of the other customers did, and this Henry Allison is on his hands and knees on the sidewalk looking up at Lannigan, and I never saw anybody so scared in my life. And then Lannigan just stamps on the sidewalk, like you would to scare off a cat, and the little guy squeals and starts running. For all I know, he ran all the way home."

"What about the girl?"

"She just disappeared."

"How did you find out it was the



Governor's son? Somebody tell you?"

"One of the boys at the bar knew who he was and spread it."

I studied the cell bars awhile and then said, "So you want to peddle the story that the whole thing bit into Henry Allison's heart so much that he hired you to kill Lannigan?" I shook my head. "It's a straw."

"It's the only straw I got," Tony said desperately. "Look, Jimmy, I'm your brother. We maybe been walking apart the last ten years, but back on the coast we was always close. Never any arguments between you and me, and I was around when you needed me. And now I need you. You can pull this thing off for me."

I stared at my hands and said nothing.

He put a hand on my shoulder. "You worried about what happens to Henry Allison after we get our death sentences commuted? Does he spend the rest of his life in jail?" Tony smiled. "No, sir. I got that figured too. For a couple of years I'm a real good boy in the pen. I go to chapel every week. And then suddenly I announce that I can't live with it any longer. I got to tell the truth. The governor's son is innocent and the only reason I dragged him along was that I thought it would keep me

out of jail. But now I see the error of my ways. I repent and I'm ready to confess. And Henry Allison gets out, no worse for wear, and maybe the clean life added to his years."

Tony watched me. "You can do it, Jimmy. You can weave this whole thing together until it holds water. You always had the working brains in the family."

I took a deep breath. "I don't know, Tony. I don't know."

His voice was soft, but to the point. "It's either that or I go to the chair. It's up to you, Jimmy."

I had been sitting on his bunk. Now I got up. "I'll look at it, Tony. Maybe I can do something. In the meantime, just keep your mouth shut and say nothing to anyone."

Outside the building, I went to the nearest drugstore phone book and looked up Confidential Investigations. I copied down the address and took a taxi to the Fairmount Building. I found the offices of O'Herne and Bradley on the fifth floor.

A secretary showed me into the office of Julius O'Herne.

I took the chair indicated. "I'd like to have a man investigated."

O'Herne, a thin, balding man, picked up a pen. "Your name, please?"

"John Smith."

He looked up and smiled faintly. "All right, Mr. Smith. What's the

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name of this man you would like us to keep under surveillance?"

"Henry Allison."

He wrote that down. "His address?"

"I don't know. I'll let you find that out."

"Mr. Smith," he said mildly. "There are probably dozens of men . . ."

"You might find him in the executive mansion. I'm not sure. He's the Governor's son."

O'Herne lifted an eyebrow.

I glared. "I don't care who he is. If my wife thinks she can get away with . . ." I stopped and cleared my throat. "I want you to find out everything you can about Henry Allison. Put as many men on it as necessary, but I want results immediately."

That made him happy. "Of course, Mr. Smith. I'll get the wheels moving right away. Where shall we send the reports?"

"I'll be back here tomorrow and I expect to see something."

The next afternoon I cashed a personal check and went back to the Fairmount Building.

O'Herne glanced at some reports on his desk. "Well, Henry Allison doesn't live in the executive mansion. He's here in the family home in Fox Point. And, from the descriptions we've been able to get, he seems entirely unprepossessing."

He looked up. "But on the other hand, you never know what women see in some . . ." He let that trail off. "Allison weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds. Neutral eyes, neutral hair, neutral everything. The only accent mark on him is that he happens to be a bug on chess. Did practically nothing else but play the game when he went to college."

"Does he have to do anything for a living?"

"He has an office in his father's newspaper. He reports there on working days and makes paper airplanes. The employees are polite, but nobody needs him."

O'Herne turned over a page. "Funny thing, though. From what our men have been able to discover, he hasn't left the house for more than two weeks."

"Why?"

O'Herne shrugged. "We don't know yet. He just suddenly went into hiding. He has a section of the second floor of the Allison place all to himself and he won't see anybody." He shoved the reports over to me. "Shall we continue the surveillance and investigation?"

I shook my head. "I've had a show-down, I mean a talk with my wife, and she promised . . ." I folded the reports and put them in my pocket. "I think I have enough information, for the time being."

O'Herne was disappointed, but bore up. "If things shouldn't work out, remember that we are at your disposal. People have always found us very helpful whenever they needed any material that would stand up in court. Where shall we send the bill, Mr. Smith?"

"I'll pay cash now."

I had a cup of coffee at a diner while I studied O'Herne's reports, and then I rented a car.

The Allison home was located in a northern suburb of the city. I drove slowly up the long winding driveway and stopped in front of the imposing three-story structure.

It was the kind of a place that needed, and had, a butler. He opened the door and waited politely.

"I would like to see Mr. Henry Allison."

His eyes flickered slightly. "I'm sorry, sir, but he isn't in."

"Of course," I said, and smiled. "Nevertheless, would you please tell him that Professor Rogers is here. I'm representing the University Chess Club."

The butler was firm. "Perhaps you could leave your phone number?"

I retained my smile. "I am quite positive that he would want to see me. You know how concerned he is about chess, and this is extremely important."

The butler weakened. "Perhaps something like this *would* get him out of his state. Would you wait inside, please. I'll be right back, sir."

He returned in a few minutes. "Follow me, sir."

We went up wide stairs to the second floor, down a central passage to a door on the right side. The butler tapped on the door.

It opened slightly. Henry Allison peered out. He wore glasses, and he regarded me warily. "Professor Rogers? I never heard of you."

"Understandable," I said. "I came to the university in '57. I believe you left, in '56?"

Henry nodded. "That's right."

"But they still talk about you at the Chess Club. You still have many warm faculty friends there."

He flushed with pleasure. "Really? I didn't think I made much of an impression." He brushed hair from his forehead. "How is Professor Schreiber?"

"Quite well," I said. "As a matter of fact, that's why I'm here."

Henry opened the door wider. "Please come in."

I glanced about the room. It was well furnished, but comfort seemingly had precedence over taste. This was Henry's nest, his refuge from the world. Here he was warm and safe.

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"Professor Schreiber speaks about your play often," I said.

Henry still retained his flush. "He always used to say that my game lacked aggression."

"True," I said. "However, he had quite a bit of respect for your defensive play."

Henry became anxious to please. "A drink?"

"Thank you. Brandy will be fine."

He scuttled nervously about, lifting books and papers from shelves and tabletops. Finally he found a key on the fireplace mantle and unlocked the liquor cabinet. He surveyed the assortment of bottles, and had to read several of the labels before he found the brandy bottle. It was Blackwell & Teague.

He brought back two bell glasses and handed one to me. He put his on an end table, where it was soon forgotten.

I took a light green easy chair. One of the arms was badly worn. Henry could undoubtedly have replaced it, but it was probably an old friend, and Henry had so few to spare.

Henry leaned forward. "Professor Schreiber talked about me?"

"Of course. The club often goes over your best games."

Henry's heart was probably beating more rapidly than usual. "The only time Professor Schreiber ever

mentioned any of my games to me was when our club met Syracuse. I lost the deciding match. My eighteenth move was Queen's Knight four and it shouldn't have been."

"But until then," I said, "your maneuvering was masterly." My eyes went about the room again. Several chessboards were set up on small tables.

Henry followed my gaze. "I like to work the puzzles in the newspapers. And I usually solve them. Most of the time, at least."

I sipped my brandy. "Henry, the members of the club are planning a presentation chess set for Professor Schreiber."

"His birthday? That's the 29th of November. I remember, because I send him a card every year. He hasn't written to me yet, but he's a very busy man, you know." Henry got up. "I have a really fine set packed away in my bedroom closet. Perhaps the club would like to present that to him?"

"Thank you," I said. "But the club has already made its selection. However, it was felt that perhaps a few select former members would care to participate in the giving of the gift."

"Of course," Henry said. "How much would you like me to contribute?"

"Ten dollars."

"Certainly." He delved through the drawers of a desk until he found his checkbook. "Ten dollars? I'd gladly give more."

"No, we decided each one of us would contribute an identical sum. No favorites, you know. And one share comes to exactly \$10.78." I paused. "Or is it \$10.87?" I began searching through my pockets. "Today is the seventh."

He dutifully wrote that on the check and then frowned. "I thought today was the eighth?"

"I don't suppose it makes any difference," I said. "As long as the check is good. Please make it out to cash."

I continued rummaging through my pockets, and as I anticipated, Henry used the time to sign the check. He waited for further information.

I took out my wallet and began thumbing through its contents. "I'm sure I have the exact figure somewhere on me. You mentioned something about a chess set of your own?"

"Yes. Hand carved by Evans. Would you care to see it?"

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble?"

He rose. "Of course not. I'll get it right away."

I waited until he had disappeared into the bedroom, and then quickly tore the check from the

book. I sat down and carefully copied the date, the signature, and the word "cash" on the following blank. It wouldn't fool a handwriting expert, but that wasn't necessary. I put the check I had detached into my wallet.

When Henry came back, I was at one of the bookshelves examining titles.

"Here it is," Henry said. "The Evans set."

I spent ten minutes admiring the pieces and then said, "Oh, about that check. The exact sum is \$10.78."

Henry sat down, glanced at the checkbook for reorientation, and then filled in the blank lines. After he handed me the check, he indicated the nearest chess board. "Would you care for a game or two?"

I consulted my watch. "I'm really sorry, but I'm supposed to meet my wife. And I'm late as it is."

Henry said goodbye to me at the door of his suite, and I went alone back down the stairs. On the main floor landing, I stopped before the open door of what appeared to be a study. I noticed a typewriter on a corner stand.

I made sure that I was not observed and then slipped into the room. I inserted the check I had detached from Henry's checkbook into the typewriter. In the first

blank space I inserted the figure 10,000 and below it the words Ten Thousand and 00/100.

I put the check back into my wallet and let myself out the front door.

A girl was waiting beside my car. Her eyes were cool gray, she was slim, and her hair was tawny. "So you managed to see Henry?"

I smiled. "What makes you think it was Henry I saw?"

"By simple deduction. His father lives in the executive mansion in the state capital. If you had come to see one of the servants I rather doubt that you would have used the front door." She studied me. "Henry has seen no one in two weeks. What makes you so different?"

"Why don't you ask Henry?"

"He won't see me. Especially me."

I took a guess. "Are you the girl he had with him when he went to Lannigan's Club?"

Her eyes flickered. "Why should he tell you about that?"

"Couldn't I be an old friend of his?"

"Unfortunately, Henry has no friends, old or otherwise. And I'm positive you would have to be even more than a friend for Henry to unburden that particular incident." Her eyes lingered thoughtfully on my car. "Do psychiatrists have

those little tags on their license plates like the other doctors have?"

I smiled. "No."

She looked at me. "I'm the girl next door, and I've known Henry since he was five years old. Is there anything I can do to help him?"

"Are you in love with him?"

"I'm fond of him. But that's all. I'm the only one who talks to him as though he matters."

"Does he love you?"

"He may think he does, but I rather doubt that he can love anybody. He can just lean on people, and want to be wanted."

"Do you know why Henry has refused to see anyone? Is it because of what happened at Lannigan's Club?"

She considered, and then answered, "Henry is mortally and dreadfully ashamed of himself. He regards himself as a coward."

"And he is, isn't he?"

She regarded me coldly. "The world is full of tigers to some people. I'm sure that psychiatrists are aware of that." She appraised me again. "Did Henry send for you himself? Or was it his father?"

"I'd rather not say."

She nodded to herself. "It must have been Henry. I'm sure his father wouldn't have bothered."

"Henry and his father aren't close?"

Her voice was dry. "They've seen

each other on several occasions."

"What has kept his father so busy?"

"Being an Assemblyman, and then a State Senator, and now Governor. And he has no intention of letting the governorship be the last item in his biography." Some of the hardness left her face. "I do hope you can help Henry. I hope it isn't too late."

Then she walked away from me. I watched her go and I realized I hadn't even asked her name.

I drove back to the city jail and went to see my brother.

When I finished talking, his eyes were shining. "You pulled that off good. Did you have it planned before you went there?"

"No. I just wanted to see what Henry looked like. And then one thing followed another. But we still don't have enough. We need a couple of liars to back you. We need some witnesses who heard Allison hire you, and we don't want anybody with a record."

He rubbed the back of his neck. "Clean names are hard to come by. But there's Pete Robertson. He'll do like I want. He has no record, but I could give him one fast if I do a little talking. Remind him of that when you see him."

"All right. Pete Robertson. Who else?"

Tony kept his brain busy for half

a minute. "Gillie McMaster. No record that I know of. Gillie is the type who does things for money. I think a couple of grand would buy him."

I took Henry's check, the one for ten thousand dollars, out of my wallet. "When the police brought you here, did they search you?"

"Just patted me down and told me to empty my pockets."

I gave him the check. "Then you forgot to take this out of your watch pocket."

Tony folded it and put it away. "Do I spill the story to the cops now?"

"No. Give me time to rehearse Robinson and McMaster. We'll have them go to the police first. When you hear they've done that, then you tell your story to your lawyer."

Tony grinned. "He won't believe me."

"Nobody will. At first." I touched the bars of the cell with my fingertips. "So you spend a couple of years in jail and then tell the truth. What happens to me?"

"Nothing," Tony said. "Nobody here even knows I have a brother. You just go back to the coast and you're safe."

"Your lawyer knows about me."

"He won't talk. The people at the state bar are watching him, and he isn't going to get himself

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into anything he can stay out of."

"What about Gillie and Pete?"

"What do we care about them? So they get a few years for perjury."

The story made the evening edition of the next day's papers. Flanked by two cops, Henry's picture appeared on the front page. He looked lost, bewildered, and something like a child.

Five weeks later, I was in the last row of the court room when my brother took the stand.

District Attorney Steve Carney let Tony have his head. "Tell us when you first came into contact with Henry Allison."

"It was on the seventh of last month. Just a little after midnight. My phone rings and it's this Henry Allison."

"He identified himself?"

"That's right. And he says that he's read a lot about me in the papers, and is it true?"

"Is what true?"

Tony looked innocent. "You know how the newspapers are. Anytime someone disappears or gets found in a car trunk, the police got nothing better to do than to pick me up and make me uncomfortable for twenty-four hours, and that gets in the papers. So I got a reputation."

The D.A. smiled. "But there's nothing to it? Then please go on."

"So this Allison comes right out and says would I take care of somebody for him. Permanently."

"How did Allison get your phone number?"

"I'm in the book. I got nothing to hide."

"So he asked if you would take care of someone permanently. What did you say?"

"I told him he was nuts."

"But you didn't hang up?"

"Uh—no. I figured no harm could come from listening."

"And what did he tell you?"

"He said that I should come over to his place right away and we could discuss the thing."

"So you went right over?"

"Well, not right away. But I was curious and wanted to find what it was all about. At the same time, I was cautious about trotting way out there alone in the middle of the night. I mean, I got a few unfriendly people who might be setting me up for something."

"So you took Pete Robertson and Gillie McMasters along for protection? Were they armed?"

Tony looked wide-eyed. "No. They're legitimate citizens and got no records. I just figured that having them with me would stop anybody with ideas. Like you could gun down one man, but you think it over when you see three."

The D.A. indicated that Tony

should go on and he continued.

"So we drive to this Allison place, leave the car on the street, and walk up to the big house. The place is dark, but when I knock, Allison opens the door right away. I guess he must have been waiting for us."

"What time was this?"

"About one in the morning."

"You knew it was Henry Allison? You had seen him before?"

"Right." And then Tony told the courtroom the story of what had happened to Henry at Lannigan's bar.

When he finished, the D.A. said, "So Allison opened the door?"

"Yeah. But he was a little leary about Pete and Gillie being with me. So I said they were just good friends, and they wouldn't be shocked by anything he said. So he leads us up to the second floor where he's dug in, and we sit down."

Tony glanced at the jury. "I took a green chair that had a worn spot on the right arm. You'd think that anybody with Allison's money could afford something better."

"Never mind that," the district attorney said. "Go on."

"Well, this Allison gets us some brandy. Blackwell & Teague, it was. Good stuff."

The D.A. was a bit irritated by the trivia. "Go on."

"Well, Henry Allison comes right out with it. He wants me to kill Lannigan."

"Did he tell you why?"

"No. But I could figure that out. What happened at Lannigan's Club must have really bothered him."

Henry's lawyer objected, and the last sentence was stricken.

The D.A. continued. "You agreed to kill Lannigan?"

"No. I played it cag . . ." Tony cleared his throat. "I told him I thought he was kidding."

"And what did he do?"

"He grabs a checkbook and fills out everything but the amount. And he tells me to name that."

"And did you?"

"Well, no."

The D.A. showed white teeth. "You suddenly realized that Robertson and McMasters were there, and you didn't like the idea of having witnesses to your transaction?"

Tony looked away. "I told Allison to forget it, and the three of us said goodbye."

"But that didn't end it?"

"No. Allison follows us all the way down the stairs, waving the check and saying that he really means it. And we're ready to go out the front door when he says, 'Wait a minute!' And he goes into a side room—it's full of books and things—and I see him put the check into the typewriter. Then he

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brings it back and shows it to me. He's got ten thousand dollars typed in the blank spaces."

The D.A. smiled. "That's a lot of money, isn't it? So the deal was closed?"

"No," Tony said. "I told him no deal."

The D.A.'s voice was silk. "But you *did* take the check?"

Tony looked uneasy. "I was going to tear it up later."

There was laughter in the courtroom and even the judge smiled.

"Didn't Allison say something else? Didn't he say that if Lannigan wasn't dead by noon, the deal was off and he would stop payment on the check?"

Henry's lawyer, doing the right thing at the wrong time, rose to object and was sustained.

"All right, Mr. Walker," the D.A. said to Tony. "Go on."

"Well, we left and I drove Gillie and Pete to a corner and left them off."

"Then you went on to Lannigan's suite in the Medford Hotel, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"To kill him?"

"No," Tony said quickly. "I was just going to tell him about it. Let him know that somebody wanted him dead and he could do what he wanted about it."

"And then tear up the check?"

The D.A. asked sweetly. "But what did happen?"

Tony rubbed his hands on his trouser legs a few times. "Well, maybe I didn't tell him right, or Lannigan had a few drinks too many and wasn't thinking straight. The way he got it was that I was really there to kill him, and so he went for me." Tony looked at the jury. "I killed him in self-defense."

There was laughter again and this time the judge banged his gavel.

When silence was restored, the D.A. turned back to Tony. "These two 'legitimate citizens', McMasters and Robertson; why did they wait more than two days after you were arrested before they went to the police?"

Tony shrugged. "My guess is they just didn't want to buy any trouble. But then they talked it over and decided they might as well get it off their chests."

McMasters and Robertson were called to the stand and each one of them corroborated Tony's story—right down to the Blackwell & Teague.

Henry Allison had good lawyers, but the D.A. and his staff had the ammunition. There was no pushing aside the fact that Henry's signature was on the check. And state lab technicians proved that the typewriter in the downstairs study

had been used to type in the amount. As far as motive was concerned, witnesses testified that what had happened to Henry at Lannigan's Club had affected him so strongly that he had been ashamed to face anyone, and he had retreated to the second floor of his father's house, there, according to the state, to plot his revenge.

Henry, of course, denied everything. But neither he nor his lawyers could explain away the facts. The jury was out only one and a half hours and when it returned, the verdict was *Guilty*.

Henry and Tony were sentenced to die in the electric chair.

I received permission to see my brother the second day after he was transferred to the death house.

I found him enjoying a cigar. He sat on the bunk and leaned back against the wall. "This is the life."

"Did it ever occur to you that the Governor might commute only his son's execution? Not yours?"

Tony grinned. "Not for a second."

I drew on my cigarette. "Where's Henry?"

Tony waved a hand. "Down the corridor. Right next to the little door."

Yes, I thought. *That's where Henry would be. Right next to the little door.*

"Quiet as a mouse," Tony said.

"You'd never know he was there."

When the guard let me out of Tony's cell half an hour later, I walked down the corridor to the last cell.

Henry sat before a small table working on a chess problem. He looked up and brightened. "Hello, Professor Rogers. How did Professor Schreiber like the chess set the club gave him?"

"He was very pleased."

Henry got up. "You're the first visitor I've had."

"Besides your father?"

"He hasn't been here yet." Then he added defensively. "But he will be. I'm pretty sure of that."

I made my voice casual. "Hasn't she been here to see you yet?"

"She? Oh, Madelaine?" He looked away. "They told me yesterday that she was here. But I said I didn't want to see her."

"Why not?"

He avoided my eyes. "You must have read about it in the papers. I mean about what happened at Lannigan's Club." He sighed. "You know, every man, no matter how little or insignificant he may be, still has the feeling that if the time should come, he would turn into a lion for the one he loves. My time came, but I wasn't a lion. Not even for Madelaine."

"But you love her?"

He seemed puzzled. "Would I

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there." out of ater, I to the have run away if I did?" Then he shook the thought away. "Would you have time for a few games of chess?"

I looked at the guard at my elbow. He shrugged and opened the cell door.

I played three games with Henry. I could have won every one of them. But I didn't.

When I left, I found Madelaine waiting outside the warden's office.

She was surprised to see me. "You came to see Henry?"

"I saw him."

"Will he see me?"

"No. I'm afraid not. He's still pretty much ashamed."

She sighed. "Well, at least someone has seen him. That's something."

"He expects his father," I said.

She hesitated and then said, "Henry evidently didn't tell you, but I suppose you ought to know. Henry is adopted. It's quite a family secret. Henry didn't know it himself until he was twelve. Then he happened to break a window, and his father took that delightful moment to tell him the news." She met my eyes. "By the way, I don't believe I ever did get your name."

I almost told her, but then I quickly said, "David Swenson."

I visited my brother, and Henry, regularly during the next two months.

By the end of November, Tony's cigars weren't tasting as good as before. He threw one of them on the floor. "What is the Governor waiting for? A public opinion poll?"

"Almost," I said. I watched him reach for another cigar. "Tony, there's something I've known for a couple of months, but I didn't want you to worry about it. Now I'll tell you. Henry isn't the Governor's son. He was adopted."

Tony stared at me and my words took some of the color out of his face. "Look, Jimmy, you've done some wild things for me and so far they have worked. But they don't amount to anything unless this whole thing ends happy. There's just one week to go, and I'm getting nervous about it."

"All right," I said. "I'll see what I can do."

I drove to the state capital that afternoon, at three-thirty, I was shown into the Governor's office.

He glanced at the memo his secretary had evidently given him. "It isn't every day that someone comes all the way from the east coast to see me. You *are* a reporter, aren't you?"

I took a chair. "Let us say that I represent the Chronicle."

"And you mentioned to my secretary that you are a *personal* friend of Senator Michells?"

"I believe I did. Casually."

Governor Allison smiled knowingly. "That was the key that got you into my office. The senator is the Chronicle and the Chronicle is the senator. The senator has twenty-seven national delegates in his hip pocket, and he can deal them to whomever he sees fit."

I accepted a cigar. "The senator thinks highly of you."

The Governor supplied the light. "I'm listening."

I puffed life into the cigar. "He would rather like to know what you are going to do about this . . . this situation regarding your son."

Allison frowned. "Since I've been governor, I have let six men go to the chair. If I commute my son's sentence, you know what people will say. I would be finished politically."

I nodded. "Perhaps. But on the other hand, if you did let him go to the chair, the voters would have the vague feeling that you lack a heart. And that could be fatal. The senator suggests that you commute your son's death sentence and that of the other man too. Wilker? Walker? You can issue a statement to the effect that the question of capital punishment has been troubling you for years."

He regarded me pityingly. "That stinks and you know it."

I tried the cigar again. "In other

words, you're going to let your son die?"

"Actually, he's adopted," Allison said. "That is something few know, but I'm arranging to have the fact accidentally come to light. That should alter things a bit. I mean, it isn't like sending your own flesh and blood to the . . ." He rose from his chair. "Look, this Saturday I have a spot lined up on the Bronson News Review. It's prime time and a national TV hook-up. My staff and I have been working on a little speech for weeks. Frankly, we think it's rather good. Tell the senator not to miss it."

He smiled. "Look, sir, other people have been here to see me about this thing, people who control ninety-six delegates. And they think I should go through with the execution."

I rose to go.

The Governor came around his desk. "Senator Michells is an able and intelligent man. I'm sure, when he thinks this over, he will see that what my staff and I have decided to do is for the best. I'm a great admirer of his, and he knows that politically we travel the same road." He had an arm around my shoulder as we reached the door. "I'm having a little private hunting party in Canada in about a month. Perhaps the senator has some free time?"

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"He'll probably be there," I said. I drove back to the city and in the morning saw Tony.

He listened to me and sweat began to form on his forehead. "So that's it, huh?"

"That's it, Tony."

He looked at the calendar on the wall and we were silent for a while."

"Look, Tony," I said. "We tried things and they didn't work. Now I think you'd better go to the warden and set things straight."

Tony's eyes flashed. "Nothing doing. If I go to the chair, I'm taking the Governor's son with me."

"Tony, you're not doing a thing to the Governor by something like that. What happens to Henry doesn't bother him a bit."

Tony wasn't listening. "I don't deserve this deal, Jimmy. I got the reputation for putting half a dozen guys away, but I never touched nobody until I gave it to Lannigan. And that don't spell chair in my book."

"Maybe not. But you're here. And taking Henry along isn't going to change it."

"I'm not doing any favors for anybody. If I get the chair, so does Henry."

"Think it over," I said. "Do that, and you'll change your mind."

When I left Tony I went down the corridor to Henry's cell. The

guard opened the door for me. Henry smiled and began setting up the board for a game. I watched him arrange the pieces. He seemed to have gained a few pounds during the last two months.

"How do you feel, Henry?"

"Do you mean, am I afraid?" He shook his head. "No. I'm not."

I experienced a strange anger. "Why not, Henry? Why aren't you afraid?"

He thought about it. "I don't know. Maybe this is the way my life is supposed to end." He smiled faintly. "It hasn't been a very important one, you know."

"Do you want to die?"

He considered that. "No, not really. Despite everything, I suppose I want to live. But the point now is that I'm not afraid to die. I'm afraid of life, I'm afraid of people, I'm afraid of everything, but I'm not afraid to die. Somehow, it makes me feel like a man for the first time in my life."

My voice was harsh. "You'll be afraid to die. When you start walking toward that door, you will be."

He looked at me mildly. "You might be right. But that is another day, and today I am not afraid to die." He indicated the chess board. "Black or white?"

When I left, Tony was waiting at his cell bars. "How's your little friend?"

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"He says he's not afraid to die."

Tony spat. "Like hell. I'll hear him scream when they come to get him."

Outside, I went to the nearest liquor store, bought myself a bottle, and took it to my hotel room. The next morning I slept until noon and took aspirins when I finally got out of bed. I turned on the radio while I shaved and that was when I heard the news.

Tony was dead.

This morning when the guard had brought him his breakfast tray, Tony had made his final play. Using him as a shield and faking a gun in his back, Tony had tried to bluff his way past the gates. But the guards had been hard to convince, and in the ensuing struggle, Tony had been shot to death.

There was still something left in the bottle. I poured it out and drank slowly.

So that was that? The whole elaborate thing down the drain and Tony dead and soon to be buried.

And now what? Back to the coast and slip into the Walker name again? Forget about everything

unpleasant that had happened?

I began packing my suitcases.

Henry set up the traveling chess board. "White or black?"

"White," I said.

I wasn't allowed to reach over the partition, so I called out my move. "P-K4."

Henry said, "My psychiatrist says that you confessed and went to jail just as much for yourself as to save my life. Therefore, I shouldn't be clinginglly grateful. So I'll see you only once a month." Henry seemed a bit uncertain. "Or once every two months?"

"Be strong, Henry," I said. "Once every two months."

He nodded. "But then I suppose I can get Madelaine to fill in the gap. After all, she comes here on alternate visiting days. Perhaps I could teach her chess so that you two would have something to do?"

"No, thank you, Henry," I said. "We try very hard and manage to find something to talk about."

I looked at the wall clock. Twenty-two minutes more.

I sighed. "N-KB3."

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